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Obtaining and Retaining Men in Higher Education

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Obtaining and Retaining Men
in Higher Education
by Shelby Hanselman
April 2022

Master's Project
Submitted to the College of Education
and Community Innovation
At Grand Valley State University
In partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Education



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Shelby Hanselman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in Higher Education, College Student Affairs Leadership.

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Shelby Hanselman

Abstract

Men have historically outnumbered women in higher education until recent years. Research shows that women are not only more likely to enroll in college, but also are more likely to complete a degree than men. Increasing literature works to explain the potential factors that aid in explaining the gender gap in higher education. As college enrollment continues to decline, it is crucial to provide men with the interventions needed to guide their success. This project describes a semester-long educational program for first-year college men with the goal to educate them on male identities, barriers, and the skills needed to be successful in college.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Over the past years, the gender gap in higher education has been growing and fewer men are going to college. In Fall 2019, female students comprised nearly 60 percent of total undergraduate enrollment (9.4 million students) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Furthermore, men enrolling and attending college engage rather differently than women at these institutions which can negatively impact their student success both academically and in terms of sense of belonging (Trowler, Allan, & Din, 2019). Gender is a critical factor that affects a student's pursuit of a higher education degree, course selection, declaration of major, co-curricular activities, and overall engagement in the education process (Tison, Bateman, & Culver, 2009).

The importance of student engagement in determining academic success has been well established over the years. While student engagement has been deemed as important across higher education, the most important consideration is the specific ways in which engagement is looking for various students, specifically in terms of gender. Kinzie et al. (2007) reported that undergraduate women tend to devote more time in educationally purposeful activities and that men participated less often in active and collaborative learning activities. Scholars such as Ewert (2012) have also suggested that women caught up to men in college graduation rates because of declining discrimination, occupational restructuring, changing norms, and patterns of family formation. However, these reasons do not fully account for why women surpassed men in graduation rates and college enrollment. Creating opportunities for successful engagement through examining the barriers hindering the success of all students will support the goal of increasing student success of college men.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

Research shows a clear decline in enrollment of undergraduates in higher education, between Fall 2009 and Fall 2019, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 5 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES), 2021). Colleges must examine why students are not attending college and why students do not persist to graduation. University presidents ranked retention and graduation as two of the most important measures of their success (Gallup, 2016). A higher graduation rate for women is concerning for higher education institutions and raises numerous questions about gender equity in society and presents challenges for the students and institutions. Ewert (2012) suggests that a deeper understanding of the determinants of the gender gap in college completion will shed light on whether the education system adequately serves the needs of men while also informing higher education policy.

Buchman and DiPrete's (2006) research concludes that the bulk of the female advantage in college graduation arises at the college level. Models of college student persistence argue that students' experiences during college critically shape their likelihood of persistence through to degree completion by fostering commitment to earning a degree and to a particular institution (Cabrera et al., 1992). Students who are socially integrated into the college community through participation in social and academic clubs or sports are more likely to graduate than less integrated students (Ewert, 2012). This project seeks to create an educational program that actively engages and integrates first year college students who identify as male into their campus community to increase college enrollment and boost degree attainment.

Background of the Project

Women have not always outnumbered men in college enrollment and degree completion, since the 1980s, women began to reach parity with men, and in many cases surpassed men in terms of their educational attainment (McDaniel, 2012). Although women have earned better grades in school than men, women did not always choose to or had the opportunity to translate their better performance into higher levels of educational attainment (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008). Much of the research conducted in terms of gender playing a role in college enrollment has been centered around the fields of profession that are dominated by a specific gender. More women than men have enrolled and continue to enroll in fields such as education, nursing, and social science and more men enroll in fields such as science and engineering (McDaniel, 2012). This background is important because even though more conversations have been occurring and strides have been made to decrease these gaps in specific fields, this problem is occurring at the larger campus scale. There are important gender differences in academic performance that lead to women's high rates of university completion, but it is less clear why women outperform men in schools. The way that society has constructed gender identity may play an important role in explaining why this trend occurs. Social forces in the U.S. can contribute to masculine identities valuing physical dominance, athletic prowess, and often an opposition towards school while feminine identities tend to value academic success (McDaniel, 2012). These forces have encouraged women to pursue college degrees because they have not always had access to them, and it has now become a societal norm that women need a degree to be successful whereas men can be successful without one. Much work has been done to deconstruct this idea, but through the numbers of enrollment we can see that there is still much work to be done. Higher education is considered to benefit participants equally, including

enhanced earning potential and improved health and well-being, it is important that all genders have an equal chance at accessing higher education as well as to be successful in obtaining a degree (Trowler, Allan, & Din, 2019).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a professional semester-long program where men will be challenged to be successful from an early point in college. Through the educational course, first-year college students who identify as men will gain perspective on what it means to be men in college, how to explore their own identity, and gain a community of mentors and peers directly on their campus. Astin's (1975) student involvement theory and I-E-O model and Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory will be used as the theoretical frameworks to examine the barriers and challenges that men in higher education are facing. This developmental course aims to provide campus stakeholders and students the awareness and knowledge about factors that can hinder the experience for men in college, but also motivate them to persist to graduation.

Objectives of the Project

The development of this educational program at Grand Valley State University will not completely solve these concerns but is intended to be an intentional step forward in keeping men in college and complete degrees. Men experience multiple barriers hindering their sense of belonging on campus which is then directly negatively impacting their student success. This project seeks to alleviate those barriers through recognizing them and creating a sense of community for first year college men while providing both social and academic support. Not only is the intention of this project to foster student success for college men, but this course will also help campus partners, educators, and stakeholders in higher education become aware of the adversities towards men on college campuses and how these groups can be of assistance to them.

Definition of Terms

A definition of common terms used throughout this project is provided below to aid the readers understanding. The following terms have been identified and reviewed from peer reviewed and scholarly works:

- *Men* in this project is referring to any student who identifies as a man.
- *Retention* is defined as students consistently re-enroll at one institution through degree completion (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).
- *Persistence* is where students successfully satisfy program requirements leading to graduation at any given institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).
- *Sense of belonging* is defined as students' perceived support on campus and feelings of connectedness, acceptance, value, and importance to the campus community, faculty, staff, and peers (Strayhorn, 2008).
- *Student involvement* refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1984).

Scope of the Project

This project was designed with intention to be implemented at Grand Valley State University, which is a public, four-year institution. This program is created to address college men in their first year to foster community and educate these students early on the resources available to them to aid in their success. However, this project is not intended to include college men in their second-, third-, or fourth- year of college. This project addresses the barriers to those first-year students who identify as male in a general sense and does not intend to go in depth on impacts specifically of transfer students or adult learners. The first year of college can

be challenging in many ways as students are experiencing a lot of transition all at once. To increase the sense of belonging on campus for these men early on, the project will include the partnerships with various campus offices and leadership. The buy-in from campus leadership and campus partners in relation to the mentorship and continuing relationships after the program is not able to be controlled and not guaranteed, but the project aims to set these individuals up to continue this success through the students' college experience. Grand Valley State University is equipped with the offices and resources that can be of great benefit to these college men.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In the United States, men have historically outnumbered women in higher education, and it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that these trends shifted. More research is being conducted to be done to identify intervention strategies and possible explanations to this gap, aimed at the success of all students. In Fall 2019, female students comprised nearly 60 percent of total undergraduate enrollment (9.4 million students) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). McDaniel (2012) found that not only are women more likely to enroll in higher education than men in many countries, but they are also more likely to complete a degree. Higher education is designed to benefit participants equally, so it is important that all genders have an equal chance of accessing and experiencing success in higher education (Trowler, Allan, & Din, 2019).

The use of Astin's (1975) student involvement theory and I-E-O model and Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory as a theoretical framework will help examine the factors that impact why men attend and complete college at lower rates when compared to their women counterparts. The research and literature reviewed will be evaluated through the lens of Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement to better understand the inputs (family influences and gender identity) and environments (sense of belonging on campus and campus influences) that ultimately lead to the outcomes (academic performance and college success). Academic performance, campus environment and student sense of belonging, and family influences are the main themes presented as factors control the probability of men's enrollment in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Student Involvement Theory (I-E-O)

Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement has its roots in a longitudinal study of college dropouts that endeavored to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affect the student persistence in college (Astin, 1984). The theory explains that all factors in a student's experience positively or negatively impact student involvement on campus. Positive factors would increase student involvement and negative factors would directly lower student involvement. Positive factors could include building friendships and community, financial comfortability, and negative factors could include feeling homesick or financial concerns. This means that the factors that played a role in the student remaining in college suggested that they were involved and that the factors playing a role in the student's dropping out implied a lack of involvement (Astin, 1984). These factors could include, but are not limited to campus residence, family relationships, friendships, relationships with academic faculty, or extracurriculars.

Astin (1975) also asserted that if involvement occurs along a continuum, the act of dropping out can be viewed as the ultimate form of noninvolvement and anchors the involvement continuum at the lowest end. Several student background characteristics may be predictive: ability, secondary school grades, socioeconomic status, and educational aspirations, as well as the students' own predictions about their chances of finishing college (Astin, 1975). These factors are important to various stakeholders in the students' college experience such as faculty members, policymakers, families of students, and the students' themselves to ensure that they are having a successful college experience. These factors can also be used and accounted for when looking to help explain the importance and factors that can influence student retention.

Astin's Input-Environment-Output model was developed to conduct assessment in higher education and can be used to describe, explain, and predict college outcomes (Ahmed, Anantharaman, & Ismail, 2011). According to the model, student outcomes are functions of two factors including inputs and environment (Strayhorn, 2008). The inputs could be described as student demographics and precollege characteristics, the environment could be described as the college campus and experiences in college, and the outcomes or outputs is the learning and success level of students. These factors can work together like a chain reaction to create an explanation for why students may not be completing college degrees. The demographics and experiences that students bring with them into college are going to play a role in how they interact on the college campus and how they perceive their environment because of the preconceived morals and values they have. These together will shape the success levels of these students both academically and socially.

Transition Theory

Transitioning to college can be one of the biggest moments in an individual's life, but in terms of whether that be positive or negative depends on the individual. Some students dream of going away to college and see it as a time to find themselves and who they are while others may be more hesitant and nervous to leave home for the first time which make it a different experience. In this specific context, college students may have a positive transition into college which may lead them to be successful or they can have a negative transition that could potentially result in a less positive experience or departure from the institution. Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) explained transition as an event that creates a disruption of roles, routine, and relationships for the individual experiencing the transition. "Transition is a process that takes place over time rather than at one point in time (Anderson et al., 2012), and every transition

begins with an ending,” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Students are consistently going through transitions of varying scopes as they complete high school and enter higher education and sometimes students can be going through multiple transitions at once such as a student’s parents moving, experiencing a death in the family, or unexpected financial hardship which can be challenging.

Schlossberg (2008) asserted that individuals could navigate transitions more smoothly by going through a process called “taking stock”, which includes four domains: situation, support, self, and strategies. Situation refers to the circumstances at the time of the transition. The next area of support refers to the people, assets, and other factors that strengthen and motivate the student through the transition. The third area is self, and that domain is all about the individual student, their optimism and moral levels, and the student’s individual identity. The final domain is strategies, the ways, and methods of coping a student can use while in transition.

Schlossberg’s (2008) theory of transition must begin with assessing the situation that the transition is taking place. Knowing whether the transition is anticipated, unanticipated, or a nonevent helps practitioners to know how to work with students through transition (Barclay, 2017). A nonevent is an event that is not fulfilled, but something the individual student wanted. For example, a student’s inability to attend college due to test scores that fall below admission requirements. The stakeholders in the student experience need to be knowledgeable of these different components in assessing the situation at the time of transition. Support, the second domain, is critical to student success. Age is one factor that can determine what an individual's support system may look like. For example, a student’s support system in their younger years may be family members, but as they grow older, they may rely more strongly on peers and other members of society (Barclay, 2017). Specifically, their support system has the potential to grow

as they engage in more social activities such as sport communities and extracurricular activities that are heavily promoted in college years. The campus community may introduce students to mentors, teachers, or student organizations that can aid in supporting the student in transition.

If students are to transition smoothly and with increased purpose, they need to be self-aware of their beliefs, self-perceived abilities, perceptions, and attitudes (Barclay, 2017). Anderson et al. (2012) advocated for the domain of self to be looked at through two lenses: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. Personal and demographic characteristics of a student could include one's socioeconomic status, age, stage in life, state of health, ethnicity, and culture, as well as gender (Barclay, 2017). Each of these factors has the power to influence various transitions rendering it important for higher education professionals and stakeholders to consider when supporting students. Psychological resources, or the intangible inner resources that every individual has, could include state of ego development or maturity and outlook on life (Barclay, 2017). An example of these psychological resources would be self-image and the internal values that a student holds such as toxic masculinity traits. All these factors lead to the final domain of taking stock which is strategies. There can be multiple strategies available to a student for them to cope and move through their transition, but the key is to be aware of which is best for that student. If a student is struggling with classes and grades, they can either go see an advisor for assistance or could attempt to solve the problem on their own. The whole student must be taken into consideration because one strategy for aiding in transition may not be best for every student. Every student has their own individual needs and levels of support.

Research/Evaluation

Inputs

Family influences. Family structure is an element that few researchers have examined as a possible reason for the gender gap in higher education favoring women, but data shows that these structures may be impactful on men's enrollment in college. Lower academic achievement has been one of the most consistent findings in the research literature on child outcomes from single-parent families (Doherty, Willoughby, & Wilde, 2016). Due to the lower test scores and lower grades from children of single-parent households, they could be more likely to drop out of high school and not make it to enrollment in higher education. Painter and Levine (2000) found that parental divorce during the high school years of children reduced the likelihood of attending college by 16% (Doherty, Willoughby, & Wilde, 2016).

Students in college require support from various groups to be successful and one of these primary support groups is family. Therefore, the students who lack familial support are at a great disadvantage and success levels can be negatively hindered. It can also be considered to look at the education levels of the parents of these students. Egalite (2016) finds that most research identifies parental education levels as a strong correlate of children's success in school, the number of years they attend school, and their success later in life. Parents who attended college are better prepared to aid their students in not only primary education, but have a better understanding the college admission process and tools to be successful. This is important to look at in this lens as we see more men being impacted by lack of family structure and parental influences.

Male gender role conflict. The years before college in primary education are extremely developmental for students in building their values and what they consider their norms. Often,

fathers' perceptions of masculinities are heavily influenced by traditional, socially constructed expectations (Harris III & Harper, 2008). Although society has made strides towards breaking these toxic gender stereotypes and traditional style identities, much of it still exists today.

Healthy psychological development for college students can be seen in the form of engaging in campus activities and organizations, cultivating meaningful friendships, and seeking help when necessary (Harris III & Harper, 2008). Harris III and Harper (2008) explained that college men are often too reluctant to exhibit such behaviors as these because they may traditionally be defined as feminine and could conflict with lessons learned about masculinity prior to college. Male gender role conflict helps to make sense of the gender and identity-related challenges with which college men must contend (Harris III & Harper, 2008). When men are emotionally restricting themselves in this way because of these embedded social values, it can be discouraging for men to make genuine connections.

Environments

Sense of belonging on college campus and campus influences. Disproportions of men and women enrollments in college have the potential to negatively impact student interactions and social life on campus. Student engagement is widely recognized as an important influence on achievement and learning in higher education and as such is being widely researched (Kahu, 2013).

“Universities and institutions in higher education are places carved out by power dynamics, in a process similar to Valentine’s (2007) description where dominant groups occupy spaces which they stabilize through the development of hegemonic cultures, using power to define systematically those ways of being that are acceptable, in order to signal who belongs and who does not,” (Trowler, Allan, & Din, 2019).

When larger groups, whether it be based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc., are seen on a campus, it challenges the psychological sense of belonging for those smaller groups. In this case, men's sense of belonging on campus in college is challenged naturally since they are the smaller group when compared to women.

Although student engagement is generally seen as a broad, multi-faced construct, research attempts to establish relationships between gender and engagement have used both types of measures (Tison, Bateman, & Culver, 2011). If student engagement is meant to be looked at in a multi-faced construct, it can be better explained at a specific facet-level. Tison, Bateman, & Culver (2011) provide the example of gender engagement may be significantly different with facets such as student-faculty interaction. Since men overall put less of a priority on their schooling and education, their interactions with faculty may not be voluntary or they may come with hesitation. Male students are less likely to seek academic assistance from tutors, perhaps because of gender-related socio-linguistic factors and cultural pressures (Kinzie et al., 2007). Measuring these engagement levels in the scope of gender is also unique in the sense that the instruments of measurement look different at various institution. Therefore it can be sometimes difficult to draw complete conclusions which is why much of these patterns are relatively newly researched.

The type of institution that men attend can also impact their success levels. For example, Astin (1984) found in a study that a student's chances of dropping out are substantially greater at a 2-year college than at a 4-year college. Community colleges, in comparison to 4-year colleges, see more students who are part time and Astin (1984) states that those students are presumably less involved. There can also be less opportunities for involvement at community college when compared to a larger 4-year institution. It is not always the case, but when students are enrolling

in community college, they are often working full-time outside of class, or have other priorities that take significance outside of coursework. Contrary to this, students who are enrolling at a 4-year institution are often more able to immerse themselves in the campus environment and social setting which makes them feel more included and enhances belonging.

Outcomes/Outputs

Academic performance. Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) find that women's superior academic performance is an important factor that helps explain their higher college completion rates compared to men. There is ample research that has been conducted which indicates women outperform men academically. The construction of gender identity may play an important role in the gender gap in higher education (McDaniel, 2012). There is a history of different masculine and feminine identities valuing different items. McDaniel (2012) gave examples of masculine identities valuing physical dominance, athletic prowess, and sometimes an opposition toward school, while feminine identities tend to value academic success and deference to rules and authority. Reflecting on the family influences that men may have, toxic gender stereotypes can heighten these attitudes which could in turn be a possible connection as to why this gap exists in the decision to go to college for men and women.

Another factor to consider in relation to academic performance is the difference in completion rates in high school of both men and women. Dropout rates from high school vary differently per ethnic group, but nearly every group shows men having higher dropout rates. In 2005, almost 11% of men ages 16 to 24 dropped out of high school compared to just 8% of women (Snyder & Dillow, 2007). Students are more likely to enroll in college directly after high school rather than delaying enrollment. Among high school graduates, more men than women acquire a GED, which is an indicator of a lower level of college preparedness than a high school

diploma (Buchmann et al., 2008). When these men drop out of high school and then later complete a GED to enroll in college, they are missing out on college readiness programming such as college tours, academic workshops, and counselor assistance. Not having these resources can play a role in the motivation of these men to enroll in college as they do not feel as prepared or assisted as their counterparts who enroll in college directly out of high school.

Summary

Gender disparity in education is not new, but its impact on society has been and will be significant (Garibaldi, 2014). There has been a reversal in the gender gap that once existed within higher education where now women are favored, and we are seeing much fewer men attending college. Women have and continue to exceed men academically. This is an important factor to consider in high school as these different academic levels can have an impact on how men perceive themselves and their capability of attending college. McDaniel (2012) shows that women's superior academic performance can be an influential factor when looking at why men may not be attending college. There are also factors that can impair men's academic performance, one of which can be family influences. Doherty, Willoughby, & Wilde (2016) found that men who come from a single-parent family were at a greater risk of not attending college when compared to women who come from a single-parent family. Not only are there less men going to college across all racial and ethnic groups, but men are also not completing college and earning degrees at the same rate women are. The underrepresentation of any group, in this case men, has implications to impact the sense of belonging for those students (Trowler, Allan, & Din, 2019).

Astin's (1984) student development theory can help to guide a strategy for analyzing how to explain why sense of belonging on campus for men is crucial in retaining them to degree

completion. The many factors that come with college during the students' experience can positively or negatively affect the overall experience and chances of involvement for the student. Factors such as extracurricular involvement, mentorship and relationships with faculty and professors, and many other factors will either positively impact a student to have a more successful experience or will negatively impact the student to have a less successful and fulfilling experience. Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory can provide a framework for how students experience transitions during various times in their life. Individuals experience transitional times often and Schlossberg (2008) shows that students can navigate transition stress through the process of taking stock where we look at the four realms of situation, support, self, and strategy. Everyone has their own identities and way that they see themselves, but there is high priority in making sure that the stakeholders around the student are educated and aware of how to help the student navigate the situation. Men and women experience stress in different ways, so it is crucial to consider when looking at why there is a lack of men entering higher education.

Conclusion

Factors both in high school and the college environment have shown and proven that they have an impact on the experience of men in higher education and rates of degree completion. The interactions from every level with men during their educational experience are crucial. It is critical that more institutions and schools put more focus into showing the importance of education to men. For the transition to be the best and most successful that it can be, high schools and colleges need to bridge the gap between the later high school years and early college years so that men stay engaged in their educational path. The reason that Astin's (1984) model is so important to use in aiding with this problem is that it brings the attention to the behavior and

motivation levels of the student. Paying attention to the behavior and habits of college men can be crucial in their retention and universities' ability to get them to complete their degrees. If men are not given the space and resources to build community with one another as well as well as how to be successful, the gender gap may continue to be a trend in higher education.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

The gender gap in higher education has existed for years, but this gap has reversed to show a majority of college students being women. It is crucial now more than ever to work towards intervention strategies to explore men's college success. To address this growing concern, this chapter outlines a semester long program designed for first semester college students who identify as men that provides the resources and tools to aid in their success and challenge the barriers and toxic masculinity attitudes they experience. This chapter will begin with an explanation of the project components and a breakdown of the various lessons that will be covered including activities and speakers that will be present a part of the program. Following the project components, the evaluation system in place to measure whether the program was effective in supporting college men to success will be addressed. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for implementations and use of this intervention program for the future.

Project Components

The following seminar course is intended for first-year college students identifying as men at Grand Valley State University. Those who identified as men on their admissions application will be contacted with more information on how to sign up for this course and the intended benefits of participation. The primary goal of this course is to aid in building community for men early in college and to educate them about their multifaced identities, the barriers they may face, and the skills needed to be successful in college. The course will include topics such as identities, societal stereotypes, reading strategies, academic success, mentoring, intersecting identities, student involvement, and well-being. Each week's focus will be described

in detail and will include learning outcomes related to the topic. See Appendix A for a syllabus and full schedule of the course.

Course Content

Introductions and community building

The beginning of the program will focus on introductory activities intentionally designed to build community and trust among the participants. This will also create investment into the program from the beginning. Students participating in the program will be given the chance to introduce themselves to the group and share information such as their intended major, hometown, why they chose to participate in the program, and any interesting facts they would like to share to the group. The students will also get debriefed on what the topics for the semester look like and what areas will be covered. Alongside the student participants in the program participating in these introductory activities, the mentors will also be invited and participate. Prior to beginning the program, the students will have received their mentor pairing, and this will be the first time for them to meet in person. Not only will the mentor and mentee pairings be able to meet for the first time, but the students will also get to meet all the mentors. Many believe that the presence of role models positively influences the behavior and success of students (Koch & Zahedi, 2018). This is intentional to help the students get to know staff and faculty on the campus and be able to know familiar faces as they navigate getting transitioned onto campus.

Identity development and social stereotypes

To understand men's identity development, student affairs professionals need to explore how men see themselves as men within "the context of the restraints, constraints, and expectations of the male gender role," (Davis, 2002). To understand the socialization of gender and how men see themselves, there will be an activity conducted known as the gender box

activity, created by the Oakland Men's Project (n.d.). The gender box activity is broken down into three simple steps that the participants of the course will go through. The materials needed for this activity are paper and a writing utensil. The participants will begin by drawing a box on a sheet of paper. The facilitator of the activity will then ask the participants to brainstorm and write down what words, phrases, or characteristics that come to their mind when they think about what it means to "act like a man" in society. This is intended to get students to start thinking of the stereotypes and societal norms that are placed on men. Once the students have written down their own answers, the facilitator can ask the students to share out and will write the activity on the board as well. Having the students both do the activity independently as well as share out their thoughts and see the activity done with the collective thoughts will help them process their own thoughts while also working as a collective group. It is important to note that this activity is meant to show the collective and societal stereotypes that exist and not as much on the individual behavior of each member.

Next, participants will be asked to think of labels that could or are used to describe those men who do not conform or identify themselves as the characteristics in the box. These labels should be written outside and around the box. This part of the activity is where it could begin to feel uncomfortable for some participants so it is crucial to preface that it is a safe space and that everyone must uphold respect as this is intended to be educational and not hurtful or aimed towards anyone. After those answers are shared out, participants will be asked to discuss and share what could happen physically or verbally to those individuals that are outside of the box.

Tillapaugh and McGowan (2019) discuss how although this activity can come at a time that is a starting point particularly for college men who have not put much thought into what it means to be a man or the role of masculinity in their lives, this activity may help individuals in

understanding. Another crucial aspect to this activity that will be needed to be for the facilitator to challenge the responses from the participants. The facilitator for this discussion will be a representative from Black Male Scholars at Grand Valley. The challenge is what is going to be what helps the students engage and genuinely learn how these social constructs have come to be. A final takeaway from this activity is to remind students that these are expectations from society and not realistic.

Academic success

Research demonstrated that large numbers of first year college students do not possess adequate reading abilities, but specifically men are a demographic struggling in this category of literacy (Poole, 2019). As discussed in previous chapters, there is an importance to focus and highlight on the academic success of college men to help close the gap of academic excellence from their women counterparts. A study done by Poole (2019) set out two goals in their study: to investigate the strategies that first-semester college men used while reading academic texts and to determine if there was a relationship between academic success and the frequency of use of such strategies.

To help the men in the program work through various academic strategies to help them be successful in the classroom, the Student Academic Success Center at Grand Valley State University will be brought in as a resource and as a facilitator. Together the participants will create semester success plans and discuss topics such as time management, goal setting, reading and research, communicating with professors, and more. Students will also be able to get a lesson on academic policies at the university to make sure that they are fully aware. The tutoring center will also be brought in as a campus partner and co-facilitator for this week to highlight the services that they offer. It can be difficult for students to make the first step in finding these

resources when new to campus. Bringing the resources to the students to show them the support that is available to them and the importance of staying on top of their academics will be beneficial in showing students that these offices are here to support them.

Intersecting identities

Recognizing that men's identities are complex and not something that every student may fully understand of themselves, this week will focus on marginalized identities of men. Robbins and McGowan (2016) pointed out key points to highlight when discussing and creating programming around intersecting identities with men. The first is that educators must recognize that gender is inseparably connected to students' other social identities. Next, educators must understand that student's gender identities are shaped by social structural inequities. Through using these intersectional perspectives of gender in college men and masculinities programming promotes the meaning-making of students' lived experiences while also promoting efforts to dismantle systemic oppression.

For the program this week, there will be the opportunity for collaboration with multiple of the social justice centered offices on Grand Valley State University's campus. All the offices mentioned will be co-facilitating the conversations for this week. The first example collaboration will be with the Office of Multicultural Affairs at Grand Valley State University. By bringing in the Office of Multicultural Affairs to have a discussion with participants in the course, students will be able to have a better understanding not only of identities, but also gain knowledge of the resources and programs available right on their campus. A few examples of the resources that the Office of Multicultural Affairs can provide to students is information on Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Latino/a/x, and Native American students and resources available to those specific groups that the men may identify with. Even if the men in

the course do not identify with these example cultural identities the goal is to educate the men on how these identities can impact their experiences in college and overall. Other offices on Grand Valley State University's campus that will be invited to collaborate on the topic this week are the LGBT Resource Center, Disability Support Resources, and Campus Interfaith Resources. The men in the course will be able to explore identity through the various lenses of race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion/worldview, class status, and others. The Grand Valley State University Social Justice Centers put a high priority on the importance of intersecting identity events and initiatives. As an activity, the participants will also be completing an identity map. The purpose of completing the activity is to help gain a better understanding of not only who the students are as individuals, but also in their community.

Student involvement

Astin (1984) examines that for men the most common reason for dropping out was boredom with academic courses, clearly implying a lack of involvement. Student involvement is important to college men as it is a steppingstone to building and fostering community and a support system for these men. For the discussion this week around the importance of student involvement, the Office of Student Life at Grand Valley State University will come and speak to the participants in the course. Social involvement can be beneficial to men as they can explore their different identities and find the best fit for them. Men will learn the various ways to get involved in the hundreds of student organizations that Grand Valley State University has to offer. Guest speakers from specific organizations geared towards men will also be brought in as example organizations to get involved in, but all student organizations will be highlighted. Not only will the organizations be discussed, and men will learn what organizations there are on campus, but the men in the course will also be required to attend a minimum of two events for

two different organizations. It will be emphasized that the men are not required to commit membership to the organization, but rather that the point is for them to experiment with social involvement on campus. Participants will write a summary of what event they attended and what organization it was for and what they thought about it. The goal is to get them reflecting on what their needs are and how they can find places that will be of benefit to them on campus.

A key theme that will be discussed this week is that involvement is not just within social organizations. Student involvement can be within academics, athletics, residence life, or even interactions with staff and faculty on campus. As a majority of first year students at Grand Valley State University will live on campus in residence halls, it will also be of importance to highlight the importance of building community and how to be involved in that setting. Living on campus provides multiple benefits to students and has been proven to increase a student's chances of persisting through college (Astin, 1984).

Well-Being

For the final week of the program, the focus will be on combatting the stress and importance of mental health to these men. As discussed in the previous chapter, the transition into college is complicated and can present specific challenges and barriers to men. It is important for these men to know the mental health and well-being resources available to them and the importance of utilizing them. The counseling center will come in to discuss the importance of mental health in men specifically with self-help strategies, alcohol awareness, and other programs that they have to offer students. Recreation and Wellness will also come in to talk about the healthy lifestyle development and how it can impact student success. It is intentional to have this be the final week of the program as it will be a wrap up to highlight that although they have now been further educated in male identity and barriers they face, but now

how to specifically practice wellness strategies to be successful. The student's health and well-being are of most importance for these men to be successful and persist through college.

Mentoring

Many men's peer spaces in higher education fall among a spectrum of problematic to promising (Tillpaugh & McGowan, 2019). However, more student affairs professionals today are learning and have begun to use the influence that men's groups must challenge the societal norms that they have created. Mentoring is another strategy that can be used to support the learning, growth, success, and engagement of men on campus (Tillpaugh & McGowan, 2019). Much of the mentoring programs that higher education institutions are seeing is centered around men of color. Although these programs are successful for those students, it is important to offer a larger scale of mentor programming for men that includes more of low-income men, men with disabilities, and men from religious minority groups (Tillpaugh & McGowan, 2019).

As research on mentorship continues to grow, mentoring should be framed as "a dynamic relationship where a senior member (mentor) guides a junior member (mentee) through formal and informal professional development experiences to help expand professional, psychosocial, political academic and resource-gathering skills" rather than trying to fix young men (Torrens, Salinas, & Floyd, 2017).

For the duration of the program, students will be paired with an assigned mentor. There will be a survey sent out prior to the beginning of the course to gather information from the students about their needs, demographic, and interests and that will be used to assign mentor pairings. The mentors selected for the program will be men who are either faculty, staff, or grad students at Grand Valley State University. There is also a hope that students who graduate from the program will later come back and can be a mentor to future students in the program. The

selection will be intentional so that mentors can be of greatest assistance to their mentee. Frequent, meaningful interactions between students and faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, are important to learning and personal development, and a host of gains including academic skill development, social self-confidence, academic and social integration, and leadership (Kinzie et al., 2007). All the participants in the course will meet bi-weekly with their mentors but can also meet more frequently. Together, the pairings will participate in masculinity dialogues about what it means to be men in college, struggles, successes, and foster true relationships. The goal of this mentoring is for the students to be able to create meaningful relationships with someone else on the campus that they can continue through their college career and beyond.

Project Evaluation

The style of assessment that will be used to evaluate the program will be outcomes-based assessment. Bresciani, Gardner, and Hickmott (2009) describe outcomes-based assessment as a systematic and intentional process where outcomes are planned and determined if they are achieved based on results from implemented methods. This method of evaluation will be helpful in intentionally using the data collected to inform and the future decision-making that takes place for the program as well as for the institution. Bresciani, Gardner, and Hickmott (2009) describe the use of assessment cycles to conceptualize outcomes-based assessment. Tillpaugh and McGowan (2019) describe six phases of an assessment cycle that can be used to assess men and masculinity programs as identify goals, develop learning and program outcomes, design assessment methods, collect and analyze data, communicate findings, and refine and change. As cited in Appendix B for the specific questions centered around the learning outcomes that will be sent to students before and after the course about how they feel they gained confidence,

knowledge, and awareness of the various topics discussed in the course. This will help the instructor generalize conclusions from the course and its effectiveness. The assessment cycle approach to outcomes-based assessment uses results in ways that advocate for college men and masculinities programs and services while advancing student learning, development, and success (Tillpaugh & McGowan, 2019).

Project Conclusions

Harper and Harris (2010) argue that individuals working in higher education have a moral responsibility to help young men understand not only why and how they have been socialized to their gender identity but also what their gender identity and sense of masculinity means for their future. To understand men's success in college it is important to recognize and evaluate the factors that they are bringing with them, and the barriers society has created for them. More universities in recent years have been working to recognize these inputs and how the collegiate environment can work to break the toxic stereotypes around men's identities and their college success. The work of Astin and his model of how inputs and environments have a direct impact on the outputs of student success which in this case is the retention and degree completion of men. While much more research has been done into the factors that are contributing to the alarming dropout rates of college men, more programs focused in men and masculinities need to be created to generate conclusions on what practices will be most successful for men's success.

Plans for Implementation

This program would be of most benefit to first-year students identifying as men. Potential growth of the program could give the opportunity for programming for students identifying as men at all levels of college, but this course will be intended specifically for first-year students.

For this course to be of most benefit to students there will need to be collaboration with multiple campus partners such as the Counseling Center, Office of Student Life, Office of Multicultural Affairs, LGBT Resource Center, Residence Life, and many more. The recruiting for men to take this course will begin before the men step foot on campus. Fostering community within the various campus partners and directly bringing the resources to the men in the program will assist in showing the men that they are not only able to use these resources, but they should be using them. Through a partnership with admissions, those who identify as men will be contacted directly with information regarding the program so that they can either sign up when scheduling classes or contact the organizer for more information. Ideally, the men who complete this program would have the skills to be more resilient towards their degree completion and challenge the societal norms of masculine identities.

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Appendix A
Course Schedule and Learning Outcomes

Syllabus			
<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Activity/Assignment</u>	<u>Facilitator(s)/Guests</u>
August 29th	Introductions & Team Building	Meet & Greet Mentor/Mentee Pairings	Undergraduate Admissions Representative
September 5th	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		
September 12th	Identity Development & Social Stereotypes	Gender Box Activity	Black Male Scholars
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be able to identify how gender has been socialized to create toxic masculine behaviors and give examples of stereotypes that have been placed on men 		
September 19th	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		
September 26th	Academic Success	Semester Success Plans	Student Academic Success Center (SASC) & the Tutoring Center
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be able to recognize at least 3 resources that are offered through both the Student Academic Success Center and the Tutoring Center • Participants will know the fundamental components to Grand Valley State University's academic policies • Participants will be able to create an academic success plan for their first year and understand how to continue making success plans after their first year 		
October 3rd	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		
October 10th	Intersecting Identities	Identity Map Building	Office of Multicultural Affairs, LGBT Resource Center, Disability Support Services, and Campus Interfaith Resources

Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be able to identify examples of marginalized identities of men • Participants will be able to better understand their own identity and how it works in society and their own community 		
October 17th	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		
October 24th	Student Involvement	Involvement Fair	Office of Student Life & Housing and Residence Life
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be able to identify various forms of student involvement both academically and socially • Participants will be able to identify at least 2 student organizations offered by Grand Valley State University • Participants will know the process to navigate student organizations and their joining processes 		
October 31st	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		
November 7th	Well-Being	Mindfulness Activities	The Counseling Center & Recreation and Wellness
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be able to identify triggers to men's mental health and well-being • Participants will be able to recognize and identify strategies to cope with mental health concerns and resources available from the Counseling Center 		
November 14th	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		
November 21st	Wrap-Up	Closing Presentations	Undergraduate Admissions Rep
November 28th	Mentor/Mentee Meeting		

Appendix B

Assessment Evaluation

This assessment will be sent before and after the completion of the course.

Identity Development & Social Stereotypes

I can identify toxic masculine behaviors.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I can identify stereotypes that have been placed on men in society.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I feel comfortable challenging these stereotypes placed on men.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I understand my identity as a man.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Academic Success

I understand the Grand Valley State University academic policies

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please identify three resources that are offered from either the Student Academic Success Center or the Tutoring Center

1. *
2. *
3. *

I feel confident in making an academic success plan for myself

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Intersecting Identities

I can identify examples of marginalized identities of men

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I can identify how my own identity as a man relates to society

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Student Involvement

I can identify specific ways to get involved both socially and academically at Grand Valley State University

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please name two student organizations that are at Grand Valley State University

1. *
2. *

I know how to navigate how to join a student organization on campus

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Well-Being

I can identify triggers to men's mental health and well-being

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I can identify coping mechanisms and strategies to navigate the mental health concerns men face

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please identify a resource available from the Counseling Center or Recreation and Well-Being

1. *